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## Iowa State Perfect Popcorn Poppability

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## Iowa State Perfect

# Popcorn Poppability

EVERY day in the laboratories of the Iowa State greenhouse, experiments and tests are being made to improve popcorn grown at college farms and to combine the best qualities into one hybrid.

Work on popcorn improvement was begun on a limited scale at the Iowa station in 1928. By 1943 a large volume of data on factors affecting popping volume, curing and storage had been accumulated and the results of this series of experiments were summarized in the Experiment Station Bulletin, *Popcorn in Iowa*.

Agriculture students are now working at the greenhouse making test after test of each type of popcorn. High quality popcorn should be tender, crisp, reasonably free from coarse hulls, and have a good flavor.

Freshly picked ears of popcorn are hung in open bags for several weeks to allow the moisture to become equally distributed throughout the entire lot of corn. The right amount of moisture must always be retained in popcorn, since it will not pop satisfactorily if it is too dry. It is the expansion of moisture in the kernel as it changes to steam which cause the popcorn to burst open. In the average home shelled corn in open containers or paper bags dries out rapidly, especially during the winter when the humidity in heated rooms usually is low. Grocery stores often allow the popcorn they sell to become too dry.

Contrary to general belief, popcorn which has become too dry to pop well can be brought back into popping condition. Water can be added directly to small quantities. As soon as the water is added the corn must be thoroughly stirred in order to insure uniform distribution. The container must be closed tightly and allowed to stand a few days until the moisture has had time to penetrate the kernels.

When the desired moisture is obtained, the popcorn is shelled and packaged and sent to the greenhouse laboratory where the tests are made. A sample of 100cc. of each type of popcorn is measured out to be popped separately. Salt and salad oil are added to each portion before it is popped. The tests are made much the same as popcorn is popped in the home.

After popping, the corn is emptied above a funnel and falls into a round tube in which the popping column can be measured. This is measured as units of popped corn obtained from one unit of unpopped corn. High expansion is very desirable not only from the standpoint of the buyer who sells his product on a volume basis but because the larger, lighter and fluffier popped kernels usually are more tender.

In order to determine the amount of popcorn actually popped, it is put through a sieve and the unpopped portion is shaken into a pan and counted. After the results from the tests are made and recorded, the data is compiled and used in further experiments and the improved seed may be sent to the growers.

In the search for better and better popcorn, another food is being added to the long list of those which are constantly improved for the homemaker of tomorrow—*Marjorie Kessler*